

Testimony of
Thomas P. Jacobus
General Manager, Washington Aqueduct
Baltimore District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Before the
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives

May 21, 2004

Good Morning, Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee. I am Tom Jacobus, the General Manager of Washington Aqueduct.

We appreciate the opportunity to return to update this Committee on the actions we have taken since your March 5, 2004 hearing to reduce the elevated concentrations of lead in the drinking water found in some homes in the District of Columbia.

Since February 2, 2004, our highest priority has been to reevaluate the corrosion control treatment we use to protect the end users of the drinking water in the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia from the naturally corrosive effects of the water and to develop a treatment modification to make the water less corrosive.

We have begun to install equipment that will be used to modify the corrosion control treatment in a way that we believe will reduce the concentrations of lead in drinking water that remains in contact with lead pipes, lead solder joints and fixtures. A partial system application is scheduled to begin on June 1 in a small portion of the District of Columbia's service area. Later this summer we will commence with a full system application that will include not only

the District of Columbia but the Arlington County and the City of Falls Church distribution systems in Virginia as well. We are approaching it in two steps to be able to carefully control and evaluate the initial application to ensure that the programmed dose of the inhibitor does not generate any unexpected secondary effects. One known possible effect of the application of the corrosion inhibitor may be the localized release of rust from iron pipes. This would result in discolored water delivered to the consumer, but it will be short-term phenomena and can be managed by flushing.

In arriving at this treatment change we have had access to the nation's very best scientific and technical talent in this field. We appreciate the resources that the Environmental Protection Agency has expended to assist not only us but also to look at the larger aspects of this issue.

In the process of doing this we have worked closely with our wholesale customers in the District of Columbia and Virginia, our colleagues in the departments of health in the District of Columbia and Virginia, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. While the level of activity has certainly been higher than normal, we have operated within the current program established by Congress in the Safe Drinking Water Act and implemented by the Environmental Protection Agency.

I believe that the program has worked well and that each of us has had the opportunity to effectively collaborate on both the nature of the problem and its solution while maintaining our independent responsibilities. I also believe that the current safe drinking water program is adequate to meet the expectations of the public to consume safe water.

In dealing with the current problem, we have also taken the opportunity to evaluate our organization and our procedures and make adjustments. I would like to report on some of our conclusions and actions.

The Technical Committee of the Washington Aqueduct Wholesale Customer Board meets at least quarterly. It currently makes a detailed review of filtered water turbidity, Total Coliform Rule compliance, and Disinfection Byproduct Rule compliance. The committee has met several times since February 1, 2004, to focus on corrosion control. We have now incorporated corrosion control treatment as a specific agenda item for all future meetings of the Technical Committee. By doing this, we will have a procedure in place for the Washington Aqueduct customers to share lead and copper data and for us to collectively evaluate corrosion control treatment.

Additionally, Washington Aqueduct is taking two other actions. First we are adjusting the structure of our organization to integrate an existing water quality office and the capability of our plant operations branch, including our water quality laboratory. This change will give us greater depth and remove any ambiguity for responsibility to track water quality parameters and to coordinate with our customers. Second, we are asking our customers to participate in more frequent and more structured meetings that we expect will improve an ongoing information loop involving them with our water quality office. These meetings will be at the scientist level and will be in addition to the Technical Committee, which has an operational and engineering focus. I believe these two structural changes, in conjunction with a more robust information flow, will better position the Washington Aqueduct and its wholesale customers to effectively ensure water quality.

We do not specifically know why the optimal corrosion control treatment being used by Washington Aqueduct was not adequate to prevent the increased concentrations of lead in some drinking water in the District of Columbia. Therefore, I cannot say with specificity if the provisions proposed in HR 4268 might have been effective in preventing the current situation. The current regulations and relationships have served us well in addressing corrective

actions to modify the chemistry to reduce leaching from service lines and plumbing.

Although the question of who should be responsible for the District of Columbia's drinking water and enforcing compliance with federal standards is a matter of legislative interpretation and policy, I believe that the current business arrangement whereby the Washington Aqueduct is the wholesale provider to the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority, Arlington County and the City of Falls Church is sound. We work effectively with Region 3 of the Environmental Protection Agency as the primacy agency responsible for drinking water, and we have effective contact with agencies within the District of Columbia government, including, of course, the District's Department of Health.

This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to respond to any questions.